

Actually, That's Not In the Bible

The Bible may be the most revered book in America, but it's also one of the most misquoted. We often hear phrases every day that are thought to be from the Bible but they are not in the God's Book even though they may be good sayings.

Politicians, motivational speakers, coaches – even pastor quote passages that actually have no place in the Bible. People rarely challenge them because biblical ignorance is so pervasive that it even reaches groups of people who should know better.

Most people, who profess a deep love of the Bible, some have not really actually read the book. They have memorized parts of texts that they can string together to prove the biblical basis for whatever it is they are trying to say or to make a point they believe, but they ignore to the vast majority of the text.

These quotes are either frequently misquoted from the Bible or not there at all.

I also have some things that are frequently thought to be in the Bible, but are not. I have tried to provide a origin of each, if I could find one.

Where do these phantom passages come from?

It's easy to blame the spread of phantom biblical passages on pervasive biblical illiteracy. But the causes are varied and go back centuries.

Some of the guilty parties are anonymous, lost to history. They are artists and storytellers who over the years embellished biblical stories and passages with their own twists.

If, say, you were an anonymous artist painting the Garden of Eden during the Renaissance, why not portray the serpent as the devil to give some punch to your creation? And if you're a preacher telling a story about Jonah, doesn't it just sound better to say that Jonah was swallowed by a whale, not a "great fish"?

Others blame the spread of phantom Bible passages on King James, or more specifically the declining popularity of the King James translation of the Bible.

That translation, which marks 400 years of existence this year, had a near monopoly on the Bible market as recently as 50 years ago, says Douglas Jacobsen, a professor of church history and theology at Messiah College in Pennsylvania.

"If you quoted the Bible and got it wrong then, people were more likely to notice because there was only one text," he says. "Today, so many different translations are used that almost no one can tell for sure if something supposedly from the Bible is being quoted accurately or not."

Others blame the spread of phantom biblical verses on Martin Luther, the German monk who ignited the Protestant Reformation, the massive “protest” against the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church that led to the formation of Protestant church denominations.

“It is a great Protestant tradition for anyone - milkmaid, cobbler, or innkeeper - to be able to pick up the Bible and read for herself. No need for a highly trained scholar or cleric to walk a lay person through the text,” says Craig Hazen, director of the Christian Apologetics program at Biola University in Southern California.

But often the milkmaid, the cobbler - and the NFL coach - start creating biblical passages without the guidance of biblical experts, he says.

“You can see this manifest today in living room Bible studies across North America where lovely Christian people, with no training whatsoever, drink decaf, eat brownies and ask each other, ‘What does this text mean to you?’” Hazen says.

Popular Sayings

"God helps those who help themselves."

This saying resembles nothing in scripture and comes from Benjamin Franklin. Actually, it stands at odds with what scripture teaches. God in fact helps people often. All of humanity is helpless in its sinful state, yet God made a way of atonement for those that will accept it. Scripture also teaches to give to the poor, look after orphans and widows, and serve others.

"Cleanliness is next to godliness."

Despite the strict rules given to the Israelites about uncleanness as a metaphor for sinfulness and ceremonial washing required by the priests (see: Exodus, Leviticus), this phrase is not in the Bible. It originated as an ancient Babylonian and Hebrew proverb, but became very popular during the Victorian era after being revived by Sir Francis Bacon and John Wesley. Is the proverb true beyond the metaphor? A new study shows that people are generally fairer and more generous when in a clean-smelling environment. But Jesus also exhorts us to worry more about the sin in our hearts than the dirt on our hands (Matthew 7:18-23).

"It is better to cast your seed in the belly of a whore than to spill it out on the ground."

This verse is usually used to justify fornication or adultery over masturbation. It is one more misinterpretation of the story of Onan in Genesis 38:6-10. Onan's brother died, and Onan had the responsibility of marrying his brother's wife to provide an heir. Instead, Onan "wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother." This passage isn't even about masturbation; God struck Onan down because he selfishly refused to provide an heir for his brother's inheritance. In addition, the proverb is inaccurate. In no way would the Bible encourage the use of anyone other than a spouse for sexual

gratification. Instead, we are called to not allow physical appetites to control us (1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

"Hate the sin, love the sinner."

Although this is a biblical-sounding admonition, it is not directly from the Bible. It's a quote from Gandhi. As a guideline, it's valid. We are to hate sin—even our own. And we are to show love to others. Gandhi's quote is coming under fire in the world as more and more people define themselves by their sin and resent the guidelines God has given to us.

"Money is the root of all evil."

This is a common misconception with an easy fix. 1 Timothy 6:10 actually says, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil..." Money is not good or bad, and being wealthy is not a sin; Job was wealthy and described as a man who was "blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1). *Loving* money, which in the Greek is "avarice" and infers an emotional affection, is the root of all sorts of evil as the desire to accumulate wealth is placed above God and others.

"This too shall pass."

This is actually a misinterpretation of a line from "The Lament of Doer," an Old English poem. Doer has been replaced as his lord's poet, and calls to mind several other Germanic mythological figures who went through troubled times. Each refrain ends with, "that passed away, so may this." Several verses in the Bible remind us that our lives and, indeed, heaven and earth will pass away (Matthew 24:35). But while we can find comfort knowing that our earthly sorrows are temporary, we're still called to rejoice in our trials, knowing that they will lead to endurance and sanctification (James 1:2-4).

"The lion shall lay down with the lamb."

Although Jesus is both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God (Revelation 5), this phrase does not appear in the Bible. Isaiah 11:6 says, "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them." Similarly, Isaiah 65:25 reads, "The wolf and the lamb will graze together and the lion will eat straw like an ox..." The sentiment reads true, however—hunter and prey will be reconciled and live in peace in the eternal kingdom.

"God will not put more on you than you can bear."

I have actually had several well meaning Christians try to comfort me with this phrase in times past. The idea comes from I Corinthians 10:13 which states, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a

way out so that you can endure it." The scripture has nothing to do with our burdens or trials and everything to do with temptation. The correct understanding is that God will always leave us a way to flee sinful allurements. In fact, sometimes God does put more on us than we can bear, in order for us to learn to become dependent on Him.

"To thine own self be true."

The language sounds like something Solomon might have crafted in Proverbs, but actually it was Shakespeare. While I agree we must be honest about who we are, scripture teaches that we have a sinful nature. To "be true" and embrace our sinful nature is counter to scripture.

"The Seven Deadly Sins"

The list of the 7 deadly sins = wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. The first evidence of the list is from a monk in the 4th century. The list was then altered slightly by Pope Gregory I in 590. It was then popularized by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*.

"The eye is the window to the soul"

The Bible does not speak of the eye being a window to the soul, but rather is the light of the body. Matthew 6:22 & Luke 11:34

"You can be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good."

This is not found anywhere in Scripture. However Jesus was more Heavenly minded than anyone who ever lived. He also did the most earthly good.

"Moderation in all things"

This idea behind this phrase originates from Aristotle's ethics and the direct quote comes from Rome, several hundred years before Christ. Two different Romans are generally given credit - one named Terence and the other Petronius.

It should be noted that Aristotle's ethic is often misunderstood by its summary: moderation *in all things*. It is frequently reasoned by those unfamiliar with context that the common phrase means that a person should approach all things (whether healthy or unhealthy) with moderation; therefore, reasoning that a moderate amount of a bad thing can be indulged is not uncommon to find. This is an inaccurate representation of the perspective summarized in the popular phrase.

"Spare the rod, spoil the child"

Despite popular opinion, the famous saying, "Spare the rod, spoil the child," cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. The saying, however, should not be considered invalid as there are several verses that promote a similar concept.

Proverbs 13:24

*He who withholds his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

Proverbs 22:15

*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child;
The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.*

“The Apple in the Garden of Eden”

There was fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2, 3), but we do not know what kind of fruit it was. The apple grew out of Christian tradition and may have been a result of artists trying to depict The Fall. It might also have come from the Latin word for evil ("malum" = evil / "malus" = apple). Some say it was likely a pomegranate. But, we do not know.

“The Three Wise men”

First of all, Scripture does not designate the number of *magi*. Traditionally there were only three because that is the number of gifts—gold and frankincense and myrrh—presented to the Christ Child. Really there could have been any number of *magi* visiting Christ.

Another *possible* misnomer is that the wise men were present at the birth of Christ (or shortly thereafter), presenting gifts to the Christ Child in the manger. The evangelist Luke tells us that shepherds visited the Christ Child in the manger (Luk 2:8-20), but there is no mention of the *magi* at this point. In fact it seems that the *magi* could have arrived sometime later according to Matthew's account. Matthew 2:11 states they entered a house (Gk. *oikia*) which is distinct from a manger (Gk. *phatnê*). Matthew 2:16 makes reference to Herod confiscating life from all the male children in and around Bethlehem "according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men." Therefore the *magi* may have arrived circa two years after Christ's birth, despite the traditional timing of twelve days later (January 6th is the date that the *magi* arrived, however, this is working from the false premise that Christ was born on December 25th).

“The Sinners Prayer”

Though not quite a saying in itself, we hear tell of the Sinner's Prayer enough that it's easy to see why some may have come to believe it of canonical origin—and why they want to know the exact wording as found in Scripture for the lauded prayer.

The fact is, there is neither any specific formula found in Scripture for a Sinner's Prayer nor is there any biblical example of such a prayer being recommended in the salvation experience. The modern usage of the Sinner's Prayer originates in the 19th Century and was popularized by the experience-oriented evangelistic style of Charles Finney. As Scripture presents it, men should repent, believe, and be baptized. There is no mention of altar calls or sinner's prayers or requesting for Christ to enter one's heart.

That said, we shouldn't go as far as some and claim the Sinner's Prayer to be a bad thing. So long as it is accompanied by belief and repentance, we should consider the Sinner's Prayer as simply an initial instance that honest and vital, confessional aspect of a new believer's growing relationship with the Lord he now serves (cf. Romans 10:9-10).

Though, as has been stated, there is no biblical formula for the Sinner's Prayer, here is a typical example of such a prayer:

Dear Jesus: Thank You for the sacrifice You made for me. Please forgive me for all of my past sins. I repent of these actions, and with Your help, I will change and not repeat them again. I know I am not worthy; but, I willingly accept You as my Lord and my Savior, and I thank You for Your blessings over my family and me.

Conclusion

So there you have it. Some “Bible verses” that aren’t in the Bible. We should note that there is a growing trend in our society where people know less and less of what the Bible actually says and a diminishing understanding of how to interpret it. As Christians, we should read it. I know that is a novel idea.

If you read for about 5 minutes, five days a week, you can make it through the New Testament in a year. Don’t have 5 minutes in your day? Well friend, you are booking yourself too tight.

We can’t give answers if we don’t know answers. We can’t defend what we don’t read. It is hard to live our life based on something we don’t understand.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” -II Timothy 3:16-17